

# 2 who?

The story of our congregation's life and witness

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### 1. Timeline *Locating future mission in the flow of past to future*

This exercise provides an opportunity for congregations:

- to gain perspective on where they have come from and how they have reached this point
- to connect their next steps in mission to the legacy of the past
- to build confidence that they have faced crisis demanding change and managed it in the past
- to appreciate the leadership qualities required to manage change well

Create a diagram similar to the one on the next page and invite groups to add their memories of significant changes in the congregation's life in the past (It may be useful to add significant events in the congregation's life which predate the memory of any present).

Characterise each period, as in italics below.

Having completed the timeline reflect on the following questions.

- What changes in the community do you see impacting on the life of your congregation?
- What new innovations, which were feared at the time, turned out to be popular in the long run?
- How has your congregation handled change well/badly in the past? What sort of leadership was shown in either case?
- Which leaders are particularly remembered and what for?
- How has this exercise in remembering helped give you confidence that you can manage change in the future?

1890-1920	1920-1950	1950-1965	1965-1980	1980-1995	1995-2009
<p>Congregation founded</p> <p>Rev Jones</p> <p>Built Church</p> <p><i>Rapid Growth</i></p>	<p>Church split</p> <p>Rev Adams</p> <p>Rev Peacock</p> <p>Rev Allen</p> <p>Halls Built</p> <p>BB/GB formed</p> <p><i>Difficult period</i></p>	<p>Community grew – increasing attendances</p> <p>Remodeled inside of Church</p> <p>Missionary sent to serve in India</p> <p>Rev Allen</p> <p>Rev James</p> <p><i>Period of expansion</i></p>	<p>Young mothers' group formed</p> <p>Congregational Missions 1970 &amp; 1975</p> <p>Rev James</p> <p>Rev Howard</p> <p>Bowling Club</p> <p>Badminton Club</p> <p>Holiday Bible Clubs started</p> <p><i>Period of increasing organisations</i></p>	<p>Organisations in decline</p> <p>Renovation of halls</p> <p>Pews removed from rear of Church to create social space</p> <p>Invitation services begun</p> <p>Praise band introduced</p> <p>Youth worker employed</p> <p>Overseas team to Romania</p> <p>Centenary Community Mission</p> <p>Rev Howard</p> <p><i>Creative Period</i></p>	<p>Falling numbers</p> <p>Major changes in community make up</p> <p>Joint services with neighbouring churches</p> <p>'Life 2' events</p> <p>Environmental clean up</p> <p>Parent &amp; Toddler Group formed</p> <p>Youth drop in programme</p> <p>Summer team</p> <p>Rev Howard</p> <p>Rev Hanvey</p> <p><i>Community Period</i></p>

## 2. Valuing our Congregation Essentials for the journey

As we set out on the journey of mission, this exercise helps us decide what we need to take with us and what we can afford to leave behind. This approach will be especially useful in congregations where there is a feeling of discouragement and/or where there has been significant division. Using the method of 'appreciative enquiry' it seeks to construct a platform of shared values upon which the congregation can build for the future.

Place three large sheets of paper in three corners of the room headed:

**What we value  
about our church**

**What makes  
us "us"**

**Stories we tell  
about our church**

Invite individuals to add their comments under each heading.

Pull the outcome of the exercise together by asking the following questions:

- What have we learned about who we are and what is important to us?
- What positive stories emerge?
- What features of our congregational life are not present, or do not feature prominently? What does this suggest about what we might leave behind without significant loss?

## 3. Assessing our Gait Posture of the Congregation

When we use the word posture we often think of the way a person physically holds themselves. In this case we are thinking more of our congregation's bearing or attitude. The posture we adopt is determined by our experience and reaction to what is going on around us. If we feel threatened we adopt a defensive posture, if we feel at ease we adopt a more open posture.

The following exercise offers a series of pictures



aimed at helping members discuss the posture of their congregation in relation to engaging with change, community and the pain of reckoning with the loss of Christian influence in society.

The exercise uses pictures as discussion starters for the questions that follow.

EXERCISE 1: OPEN OR CLOSED POSTURE?

1. Which of the two pictures above best represents how you feel as a Christian towards today's



- society? 2. Why? 3. Which picture better represents Jesus' posture towards society in the gospels? 4. What will adopting either of these postures mean for our congregation's engagement in mission? 5. Can you suggest another picture that might represent the posture that you would most like to see your congregation adopt in mission?



#### EXERCISE 2: LEANING FORWARD OR BACK?

1. Which of the two figures above best represent how you feel your congregation is approaching the future? 2. Why? 3. Which figure better represents the Christian view of the future in the Bible? 4. What will adopting either of these postures mean for our congregation's engagement in mission? 5. Can you suggest another picture that might represent the posture that you would most like to see your congregation adopt towards the future?

#### EXERCISE 3: RESPONSE TO THE LOSS OF CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE IN SOCIETY

Denial      Anger    Depression    Readjustment

The feeling of the Church's loss of Christian influence in society has been likened to bereavement. When bereaved we often pass through various stages of grief as represented above.

1. Which of the images above best represent how you feel your congregation is approaching its loss of influence in the local community and/or society? 2. Why? 3. What will living in denial of the reality of our situation as a Church in society mean for mission? 4. What will living in anger towards the reality of our situation as a Church in society mean for mission? 5. What will living in depression over the reality of our situation as a Church in society mean for mission? 6. What will beginning to readjust to the reality of our situation as a Church in

society mean for mission? 7. What would it mean to move towards readjusting to our new situation as a congregation in mission?

## Congregational Personality Our church's operating system

Every congregation has its own personality that defines the way it goes about things. To put it another way, your congregation has a way of doing things that might be compared to a computer's



operating system.

Personality is a difficult characteristic to tie down, but we know it when we see it; perhaps more importantly in terms of mission, others know it when they see it. It is debateable whether we can change our personalities, but an important element of self-awareness is recognising the plus' and minus' of our disposition. The following exercise enables congregations to tease out their personalities and to better understand the effects they have on the process of planning for mission.

Which of the following pictures best fits how you see your congregation, and why?

1. Discuss people's choices and their reasons for them, and then offer the following congregational personality profiles.

**THE BUILDER** suggests a practical congregation with a very realistic outlook, orientated towards action and experience.

**THE SCIENTIST** suggests an innovative congregation in which there is a lot of imagination and openness to experimenting.

**THE PLANNER** suggests an analytical congregation which spends a lot of time in strategising and devising systems.

**THE SMILEY FACES** suggest a relational congregation in which the overwhelming focus is on people.

2. Having heard the congregational personality profiles, ask people if they would now change their choice.

3. Which types of personalities seem to predominate in people's self designation of their congregations? Acknowledge that different personality profiles may be operating at the same time within groups in a congregation.

4. Draw attention to the following strengths and weaknesses of each congregational personality type.

#### **THE BUILDER**

Strengths – realistic and enjoy dealing with practical problems.

Weaknesses – tend to deal with the next issue that presents itself rather than plan ahead.

#### **THE SCIENTIST**

Strengths – very flexible and adaptable to change.

Weaknesses – often don't finish what they start because are keen to try the next thing.

#### **THE PLANNER**

Strengths – organised and competent.

Weaknesses – unwilling to correct set course. Tending to overlook personal relationships.

#### **THE SMILEY FACES**

Strengths – interested in people and place high value on relationships.

Weaknesses – overly sensitive and struggle to implement change for fear of offending.

5. What difficulties does our congregation's personality type(s) present for the process of planning for mission?

6. Where do we need to supplement our dominant personality type with others?